

Muslim Scholars' Response to Boko Haram Insurgency: A Special Reference to Shaykh Muhammad Awwal (Albani Zaria)

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Abstract

Both before and after the public appearance/emergence of Boko Haram extremist group, Muslim scholars in Nigeria have not kept mute in challenging its ideologies and insurrectionist activities. However, while there is a relatively considerable degree of publicized narratives and media coverage about the extent of the group's damage to Islam, security and life threats and the state's official response, outside the country's shores, little is known and documented on the intrepid role scholars have played in engaging the group intellectually and waging enlightenment campaigns against its menace on different occasions and platforms. This paper seeks to explore and analyze the contents of some lectures of Shaykh Albani Zaria in which he x-rayed the factors of emergence, growth, ideological base and other nitty-gritty details that surround the movement, including its founder Shaykh Muhammad Yusuf. Utilizing the recorded video and audio clips of Albani's lectures, it contextualizes the scholar's approach and response to the movement within the Shari'ah framework of three stages of correcting evil as charged by a Hadith. Its main findings reveal that unknown to some, Albani not only condemned the group's ideologies and atrocities it commits, but also dared them vehemently at the risk of his life and in the interest of voicing the truth. It finally recommends an all-inclusive study of, documenting and publicizing the many contributions of Nigerian Muslim scholars towards curtailing and minimizing the spread of Boko Haram's ideologies in their various teachings and public lecture sessions.

Keywords: - Albani Zaria, Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, Islam, Nigeria, Muslims

Introduction

Islamic literature is laden with instructions and exhortations of enjoining the good and forbidding the bad. In addition to belief in Allah (*Iman*), the whole spiritual virtue and prestige of the Muslim Ummah which distinguish them from other communities are a resultant of the distinct quality of commanding the good and forbidding the bad (Q 3: 110). Muslims are called upon to ensure that there is a group of people (i.e. the Ulama') who shall work towards sanitizing the Ummah through calling others to good and pious deeds and preventing and forbidding them from evil (Q 3: 104). Contrastively, as a way of reminding them to imbibe lessons, Muslims are informed about the woes, wretchedness and destructions that consequently befell those who allowed evil to get grounds in their midst, without adequately putting forth measures to stop it. It was on that basis that some past communities were cursed (Q 5: 78-79). Advocacy of evil and discouraging from righteousness are regarded among the traits and qualities of the hypocrites (*Munafiqun*) (Q 9: 67). The overall tone of the Qur'an is that, people's success lies in their efforts towards ridding their societies from evils as well as promoting and advocating the good (Q 3: 110).

Moreover, in a Hadith narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, the Prophet (SAW) described three stages of correcting evil which are; (i) correcting it with hand (ii) correcting it with tongue, and (iii) correcting it by heart.¹

¹ Muslim: 49, Abu Dawud: 1140, Tirmizi: 2172, Ibn Majah: 1275, Nisa'i :5008 & Ahmad: 4013.

Correcting evil with hand largely imbues the duty and responsibility of leadership. The second stage; correcting evil with tongue largely refers to collective responsibility of scholars and other individuals with relative expertise. The least recommended level of correcting evil is detesting it by heart when someone does not have the authority or capability of correcting it at either of the levels above. Shaykh Awwal Albani's response to the menace of Boko Haram situates in the second stage. The scholar was one of the popular and most ardent critics of the militant group who considered rising towards the challenge a fundamental responsibility as charged by the hadith above. After all, as described in another hadith, the whole religion is *al-Nasiha* (i.e. giving good and sincere counsel), which also comes at different levels.²

This paper explores and analyzes the contents of three lectures which Shaykh Albani gave on Boko Haram at different times. The lectures are; *Karen Bana Maganin Zomo*, *In An Ki Ji Ba A Ki Gani Ba* and *Karshen Alewa Kasa*. Interestingly, all these lectures are available on you tube.³ The paper first reviews some literature related to the phenomenon of Boko Haram and insurgency in Nigeria. It then presents major points raised by Shaykh Albani in his lectures with relevant analysis and commentary where necessary. The paper closes by presenting concluding thoughts on Albani's scholarly intervention on the menace and phenomenon of Boko Haram. It also offers some recommendations.

² Muslim: 55, Abu Dawud: 4944.

³ For *Karshen Alewa Kasa* which was conducted on 15/Shā'ban, 1430 (5-August, 2009), visit <https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=Karshen+Alewa+Kasa+Sheikh+Albani+Zaria+video&oq=karshe&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i59.3739j0j7&client=tablet-android-samsung&sourceid=chrome-mobile&ie=UTF-8>, Karen Bana which was given on 11-Shā'ban, 1430 (2-August-2009) visit <https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=Karen+Bana+by+Albani+YouTube&oq=Karen+Bana+by+Albani+YouTube&aqs=chrome..69i57j013.18056j0j7&client=tablet-android-samsung&sourceid=chrome-mobile&ie=UTF-8> and *In an ki ji* on 27-Rabī'u Thāni, 1431 A.H (April 11, 2010) (<https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=in+an+ki+ji+Albani+video&oq=In+an+ki+ji+Albani+video&aqs=chrome.69i57.12627j0j9&client=tablet-android-samsung&sourceid=chrome.mobile&ie=UTF-8>). Accessed on August 16, 2018.

Literature Review

Since 2009, there have been a robust growth of interest towards studying and researching the phenomenon of Boko Haram and insurgency in Nigeria, thereby resulting to an avalanche of published academic works. Most of the works give historical background and multilayered religious and socioeconomic factors that led to its emergence. In doing so, some of the works acknowledge the roles played by religious bodies and clerics in curtailing the menace. For example, in his *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching and Politics*, Thurston (2016) notes the responses of some scholars towards Boko Haram group in Northern Nigeria, with special emphasis on the mainstream Salafis. They, as the author observes “have encountered their own difficulties”, regarding the Boko Haram predicament and “represent a formidable form of theological opposition to Boko Haram” (p. 222). In particular, he makes reference with some scholars such as Shaykhs Ja’far Mahmud Adam, Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo (p. 15), Isa Pantami (p. 229), and Albani Zaria (p. 135).⁴ Though the author has tried his best to demarcate between the Salafi ideology and that of Boko Haram, stressing that the latter has deviated from the former’s path, including the full description of the group which vividly resembles the early Islamic century dissident movement, as the author gives elsewhere,⁵ he is yet reluctant to situate their approach within the context of the Khawarij. Shaykh Albani Zaria’s lectures corroboratively fill this vacuum.

In the same vein, Ahmed’s *Boko Haram Since 2009: A Study in Security History* offers a rich historical overview of the extremist group from the time it had conflict with security forces which led to its crackdown. The work accounts for the series of activities related to the group since when it went underground and resurfaced after about a year and began launching

4 Thurston. A. (2016). *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5 Thurston, A. (2018). *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 102.

deadliest attacks on not only the security and government installations, but also the masses and other vulnerable targets. Among other issues the work outlines, it in a historical fashion, systematically acknowledges and many times makes reference to the response of scholars towards the insurgent movements and how as the result, scholars became the top targets and consequent victims of Boko Haram atrocities.⁶

Using pseudo names clothed in acronyms N.I.O & D.L.B, the authors of *Boko Haram: Between Myth and Reality* attempt to present and query some eleven popular conspiracy theories surrounding Boko Haram, with a view to offering alternative perspectives.⁷ While, some arguments presented in the work are traceable and to some extent corroborative, many other postulations in the book are baseless and unfounded. Thus, instead of addressing the myths and drawing lines between them and reality, the authors end up raising more questions than answers. No attempt is made to identify with the roles played by Muslim scholars towards tackling the ideological spread and the overall quelling of the group.

Similar thing can be said about Mohammed Abdulkarim (2010) who in his *The Paradox of Boko Haram* queries the too much attention given to the extra-judicial killing of the Boko Haram founder while ignoring the many atrocities the group perpetrated against different categories of people. While to some extent, the work is commendable for at least acknowledging the roles scholars played in tackling the Boko Haram ideologically, it brings another paradox by brandishing brazen fingers of blame against the Ulama. The author surmises that the “Ulama take a huge share in the moral responsibility of the Boko Haram crisis” and that they “have failed the Ummah by allowing the crisis to happen”.⁸ This blatantly overlooks the

6 Ahmed, A.O. (2018). *Boko Haram Since 2009: A Study in Security History*. Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA). 7th Professorial Inaugural Lecture Series, held on Tuesday September 4, 2018.

7 N.I.O & D.L.B. (n.d). *Boko Haram: Between Myth and Reality*. (no publication information).

8 Abdulkareem, A. (2010). *The Paradox of Boko Haram*. Kaduna: Moving Image Limited, p. 170.

unhidden reality that the roles Ulama played have heavily helped in thwarting the spread of the sect's ideology long before the authority was involved in fighting the group. By accusing the Ulama of "allowing the crisis to happen", one is obviously suggesting that they had executive powers to forcefully fight the group.

There were some writers whose attempt to trace the pugnacious tendencies of Boko Haram sought to link or even regard the emergence of the extremist group as a corollary of both pre and post-colonial reform movements and resistance against perceived injustice which surfaced on Nigerian soil. Notable works in this regard include Arendas's (2016) *The Boko Haram Insurgency - Driving Factors Behind the Existence of the Boko Haram Group in Nigeria*. According to the writer, the Boko Haram insurgency has historical echoes of Islamist groups of the 19th century, referring to the Danfodio's 1804 Jihad, the Sokoto Empire's resistance of colonial takeover of its territory and even the reform movement championed by Shaykh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi.⁹ The work relies heavily on less popular sources that might originally be meant to misrepresent Northern Nigerian Muslims and cast them in a bad light. There is not a single reference to globally accepted works which are regarded as authorities in the history of Sokoto Caliphate and Muslims in Northern Nigeria.

This is exactly the path towed and amplified by Abdulbasit Kassim in his *"Who Is a Muslim?": Mubi Mosque Attack, Masjid ad-Dirar, and the Historical Attempt at Defining a Muslim in the 19th, 20th and 21st Century Hausaland and Bornu*. He attempts to connect all the dastardly and nefarious activities perpetrated by Boko Haram to three distinct historical moments in Nigerian Muslim history. First, he alleges that the pioneer of *takfir* (excommunication) in Nigerian scholarly discourse was Danfodio who regarded the then Hausa rulers as infidels, and based on this conclusion took arms and waged war against them, thereby toppling their regimes.

⁹ Qurat, A. A. (2016) *The Boko Haram Insurgency - Driving Factors Behind the Existence of the Boko Haram Group in Nigeria*. A Major Research Paper, Uottawa.

Here Abdulbasit charges Danfodio of two things; *takfiri* tendency and militancy. What he either deliberately or out of scanty intellectual scrutiny fails to do is, checking whether Danfodio's 1804 jihad was a campaign that liberated the masses from the tyranny of the then rulers and what was the scope of the reform brought about by the Shaykh? Was his reform movement limited to ascending throne or it permeated all strata of life; social, education, economy, etc.¹⁰

The second epoch of *takfiri* according to Abdulbasit began in the postcolonial Nigeria and was championed by Shaykh Abubakar Gumi. Abdulbasit hides behind Izala-Sufi misunderstandings which characterized post-independence Nigeria to depict Gumi as master of *takfir*, who "prepared" the ground for Boko Haram. Though he refers the reader to Gumi's book *al-Aqidah al-Sahihah bi Muwafaqat al-Shari'ah* which ascribes "*kufir*" to whoever considers *Salat al-Fati* as spiritually worthier than the Qur'an, he however does not recognize the role the scholar played in formation of the country's regional courts and mobilizing young Muslims to partake in nation building by joining Nigeria's institutions and establishments. If Gumi at all pioneered *takfir* even within the Muslim circles, upon which Boko Haram built, how would he allow his son to join the military service? It is interesting to note that though himself a Sufi and beneficiary of colonial education, Ahmadu Bello the premier of the Northern region not only had cordial relationship with Gumi but regarded him as a sort of religious advisor and a partner in nation building.

The return of Madinah graduates represents the third phase which Abdulbasit projects as sensitive object of study. He tries to suggest that the ideology of *takfir* was incubated into Muhammad Yusuf by the Salafi graduates of Madinah. Surprisingly, Abdulbasit regards Yusuf as the leading

10 A lot of works on Sokoto Caliphate have been ignored. There is no indication that the author is familiar with authorities on the Caliphate like John Padden, Abdullahi Smith, Murray Last, Ibrahim Sulaiman, Mukhtar Bunza, Yusuf Bala Usman, Ismail Balogun, Usman Bugaje's, Ibrahim Sulaiman, etc.

figure among the disciples of Saudi returnees, turning blind eyes to his involvement in the Zakzakiya movement. Abdulbasit seems to be aware of the engagements and debates of the Salafists with Yusuf, but yet goes ahead to assert that *takfir* theory was furthered by them. He simply and rather unemphatically insinuates that firebrand “Salafi” students like Yusuf refused to abide by limitations set forth by the Saudi returnees. After all, he alleges that their preaching was refined by the influence of both the Saudi-theology and the firebrand local students.¹¹ If Madinah graduates were incubators of the Boko Haram ideology, why was it that their students all over northern Nigeria did not follow Muhammad Yusuf in order to promote the “mission” of their scholars? As will be shown later, there was even a figure who was expected to be among the early kingpins of Boko Haram, he was apparently de-radicalized when by circumstances, he secured admission and studied at the Islamic University of Madinah. Therefore, the Madinah graduates taught (and still teach) a different canon from that of Muhammad Yusuf. While Yusuf discouraged and haramize western education, they advocate and point out its essentiality. That is why now among their students there are hundred university professors, prominent attorneys and judges, medical personnel, public officers and virtually people of all strata of life.¹²

In any case, it can be observed that not much academic effort has been put on highlighting, publicizing and studying the roles played by Muslim scholars towards curtailing the menace of Boko Haram. It is interesting to note that the scholars have put every possible effort in subjecting the founder of the Boko Haram movement to ideological debates and at all those times succeeded in convincing him to realize the weak, deviant and

11 Abdulbasit, K. (2017). “Who Is a Muslim?”: Mubi Mosque Attack, Masjid ad-Dirar, and the Historical Attempt at Defining a Muslim in the 19th, 20th and 21st Century Hausaland and Bornu. <http://jihadology.net/2017/11/21/guest-post-who-is-a-muslim-mubi-mosque-attack-masjid-ad-%e1%b8%8dirar-and-the-historical-attempt-at-defining-a-muslim-in-the...1/5>. Accessed on 14/09/2018.

12 Few examples may be relevant; Prof Usman Muhammad Shu’aib (Zunnurain) is a professor of law at Bayero University, Kano and Professor Salisu Shehu, a professor education at the same institution were both students of Shaykh Ja’far Mahmud Adam.

ill-laden path he was towing. Notable among the scholars are Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam, Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdallah, Shaykh Idris Bauchi, Shaykh Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo and Shaykh Isa Ali Pantami. Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam (Albani Zaria) has, as it can be learned from his lectures, engaged the sect leadership in intellectual discourse, and has in his de-radicalization effort engaged the followership of the movement. This is perhaps what makes his response to the predicament of Boko Haram additionally unique. Shaykhs Jafar and Albani's murder might not be unconnected with their pledge to make available to the public, the audio recording and the letter written by Muhammad Yusuf's lawyer denouncing the "allegation" that he was anti-western education and working under government.

Albani's Response to Boko Haram Extremism

At the time almost everyone was not only afraid to condemn the dastardly act of Boko Haram dreaded militants, but also wary of making any ambiguous comments that would attract their wrath; at the time family members of staff of Nigerian security establishments were being condoled and sympathized with; young men who had throughout their former days nurtured ambition of joining Nigerian armed forces and other security services now changing minds, here was a scholar who took the risk of vehemently engaging the sect. Not afraid of calling a spade a spade, irrespective of whose ox is gored, Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam¹³

¹³ Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam known as Albani was born in Zaria on September 28, 1960. He had both traditional Islamic education as well as formal western education. He had his primary school at Saint Liza Missionary School in Sabon Gari, Zaria. He acquired his secondary school education from the following post-primary institutions: Government Commercial College, Demonstration Secondary School and Barewa College all in Zaria. From there, he moved to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and obtained a diploma in Law in 1988. He joined Bayero University, Kano and read Mass Communications. He was also enrolled into Federal University of Technology, Yola and obtained a degree in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in 2006. Until his murder in 2014, Albani was a masters degree student of Electrical and Electronic Engineer at ABU, Zaria. Apart from these, the scholar had acquired a lot professional certificates and had participated in a number of skill acquisition seminars, workshop and symposia. All that while, Albani was engrossed at Islamic learning, teaching and Da'wah activism. Though he did not succeed to get to Islamic University in Madinah despite getting admission in 1991, the Shaykh had had the privilege

popularly known as Albani Zaria, had dedicated series of lengthy lecture sessions in which he extensively talked on the genesis, development and activities of Boko Haram extremist group. He in a more informed fashion, availed audience with biographical insights of Muhammad Yusuf, the group's founder and the possible circumstances that led the latter to tow the exclusively militant path and *takfiri* ideology. Albani also offered some recommendations which have prospects of bringing the Boko Haram menace to a halt.

There are no less than three lectures which are still available on you tube in which the scholar spent some hours vigorously addressing Boko Haram topic.¹⁴ In some of the lectures as will be shown in this paper, Albani would give chances to some fellow scholars, close disciples and ordinary audience to corroborate the points he raised, throw some light or even present counter-arguments of what he has presented.

Karen Bana Maganin Zomon Bana was conducted on Sunday 11th of Sha'aban, 1430 A. H which was equivalent to the 2nd of August, 2009. The lecture was divided into three parts, each with running time of one and a half hours. The title of the lecturer *Karen Bana Maganin Zomon Bana*,

of studying under many of the Saudi scholars who came to Nigeria and when he travelled to Saudi Arabia. He established some educational institutions such as Darul Ahadithis Assalafiyyah, Albani Sceince Academy and Markazus Salafiyyah. Albani was widely believed to have been murdered by Boko Haram in 2014 after delivering one of his teachings in Zaria. Albani was popular as an outspoken and unapologetic Salafi who did not hesitate to call a spade a spade. He was very critical of moral, spiritual, social, political and institutional corruption that bedeviled Nigeria. As an acclaimed and widely listened-to scholar, apart from his ta'lim sessions, his lectures centered around many timely and contemporary issues in Nigeria.

Details on his biography can be found in Jamilu Magaji Uba's "A Biography of Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam (Albani Zaria) 1960-2014. It is B.A project submitted to the Department of History, Bayero University, Kano, in 2015. See also Bala, S. (2014). "Salafi Targets for 'Boko Haram': The Murder of Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam Albani Zaria (d. 2014)", in *The Annual Review of Islam in Africa*. Issue No. 12/1, 2013/2014, Centre for Contemporary Islam, University of Cape Town., p. 38.

14 In one of the lectures the scholar gave on Boko Haram, his disciple, Malam Musa Sahabi remarked that prior to the 2009 crackdown of Boko Haram in Maiduguri, his teacher almost on every occasions of his teaching sessions reserved some times to enlighten the audience on the danger of the extremist group (Karshen Alewa Kasa 1).

according to Albani, traces its origin to the Prophetic Hadith on Khawarij “*al-Khawarij Kilabun nar*”,¹⁵ meaning that members of the Khawarij sect will in addition to their punishment, be humiliated in the hereafter and reduced to an inhuman levels and detestable creatures like dogs.

It is imperative to note that there is sharp disparity between the phrase which Albani extracted from the Prophetic tradition “*al-Khawarij Kilabun nar*” and the Hausa proverb “*Karen Bana Maganin Zomon Bana*”. The Hadith is giving a categorical ruling, the abode and disgraceful position of the Khawarij, a dreaded extremist sect which emerged in the first Islamic century. The Prophet (SAW) foretold some of their features and activities. It was in that context that he described them as “*kilabun nar*” meaning “dogs of the hellfire”. On the other hand, the Hausa proverb, more or less, indicates that an activity or movement, especially the harmful or militant one, embarked upon by any person or group is better resisted and challenged using the same sophistication and approach employed by the movement. In any case, linking the title of his lecture with the Hadith, which is informed much by linguistic hint and less by jurisprudential implication, shows the magnitude and degree to which Albani detested the dastardly atrocities of Boko Haram group. It can be said that the degree and magnitude the scholar to which the scholar repulsed the group and its effort to set the Muslim Umma backward made him somehow slipped and gaffed that once a Boko Haram member was found around the premises of mosque he was preaching, he should be brought forward and be executed without referring to authorities.

As a background, the scholar gave an overview on the basis of proofs according to the Salafi canon and how, why and who should declare something as haram. He illuminated the relevance of modern education to the Qur’an. The scholar briefly outlined some features of the Khawarij.

15 Sunan Ibn Majah: 173.

More specifically, the lecture dwelled on who was Muhammad Yusuf and what were his ideologies and motives? It traced the origin and genesis of the ideology, taking into cognizance the influencers of Muhammad Yusuf as the result of which Boko Haram emerged in Nigeria. Shaykh Albani revealed the time and place where Yusuf began spreading the Boko Haram ideology, factors that paved way and facilitated the spread of the ideology, the group members, their categories and some of the reasons why they followed him.

Moreover, Shaykh Albani unfolded Boko Haram's sources of finance, arms and means of guerilla training. In this regard, he mentioned some of Muhammad Yusuf's benefactors, godfathers and sponsors in Nigeria. He highlighted the goal, aim and target of the Boko Haram leader and his Nigerian benefactors. He also gave a clue on Boko Haram's foreign link and international support. He expounded the ideological partnership and synergy of Boko Haram with another radical movement in Nigeria. The scholar casted some lights on the main mission of Muhammad Yusuf on the Maiduguri bomb explosion of July 2009.

The background given by Albani, which centered on the basis of proof according to Ahl al-Sunnah emphasized that understanding textual sources must be first based on the interpretation of the Salaf. This was meant to challenge the Boko Haram in intellectual discourse in which they were placed in a position to defend all the fragmentary positions of their ideologies which they used to justify by clinging on valid textual sources, even though out of context. What they were required here was that, they must for any verse or hadith they would quote, cite a precedent in which a Salaf interpreted it as exactly as they would. Having cited numerous quotations from Ibn Taimiyya as well as other Salafi scholars on Islamic position on Khawarij and by implication Boko Haram, Albani remarked that the movement and Salafism are two worlds apart, religiously speaking. Therefore, it is understood from Albani's explanation that it is more proper

and insightful to look at Boko Haram and its atrocious projects in the context of the Khawarij rebels.

Albani further delineated that the Boko Haram insurrectionist operations were aimed at attacking some targets. But scholars, especially those belonging to the Izala movement and members of Nigerian security establishments are the prime targets. This has been testified by the events that unfolded before and after the speech of Albani. As highlighted by Ahmed, between 2011 and 2015 alone, more than 200 well known Muslim scholars were killed by Boko Haram just for criticizing and engaging the sect intellectually.¹⁶

The movement is against scholars because, more than any other class of people, Muslim clerics were (and still are) very instrumental in posing a big intellectual challenge to it, without which it would have gained more fertile ground for massive recruitment. All the publicized debates and engagements of scholars with the group further proved how shallow and narrow its intellectual base is. By resorting to warfare and victimizing scholars more than anyone else, the group demonstrated to the Nigerian Muslims that its actions are informed much by anti-Islamic agenda and less by any effort to bring reform to the society.

Who was Muhammad Yusuf?

Albani testified and often boasted of knowing Muhammad Yusuf beyond casual information contained on media contents. Albani chronicled that though Yusuf told him that he was born around 1970, the former expressed some doubts on the age and surmised that Yusuf was younger than he claimed. Albani also narrated that Yusuf confirmed to him that he had never attended any academy – primary school, secondary school or tertiary. He also admitted not to have studied from anybody.

¹⁶ Ahmed, *Boko Haram Since 2009: A Study in Security History*, p. 28.

Albani further chronicled that Yusuf joined the revolutionary movement founded by the Shiite leader in Nigeria Ibrahim Zakzaki at about the age of 20. That was in the 1990s. He was the representative of the movement in Maiduguri. He later dumped the camp and gravitated to the Sunni line.

According to Albani, Muhammad Yusuf started making effort to spread his ideology in the mosque of Indimi, located at Damboa Road, Maiduguri but was met by some resistance and intellectual challenges. This is perhaps why some writers insist that he was influenced by Shaykh Ja'far. Meanwhile, it should be noted that Shaykh Ja'far used to present an annual Tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) and was not involved in the day-to-day running of the mosque affairs, albeit that he might be consulted. There was in the mosque, a leadership to which Muhammad Yusuf should comply. Most of Jafar's regular teachings were done outside Ramadan and mostly in his base in Kano. There is yet no mention by both critics and defenders of Shaykh Ja'far indicating that Muhammad Yusuf had ever attended any of the avalanche of teaching sessions conducted by Shaykh Ja'far in Kano or elsewhere. It is good to know that the scholar had taught many books from cover to cover and Yusuf was never among the students in any of them.

Muhammad Yusuf, Albani further explained, used an opportunity when almost all the scholars that used to give Ta'lim in the sessions went to Madinah for further studies. Yusuf utilized that chance to propagate his ideology while teaching the Sahih al-Bukhari. As soon as the scholars returned from their studies, Yusuf was expelled. This worked and impacted on his psyche. As the result, he began nursing grudge against all stakeholders in the mosque, especially the Madinah returnees. With this rift, Yusuf relocated to Railway Quarters also in Maiduguri and lived with his father-in-law. He built a mosque and continued spreading his ideology there and was joined by many other elements which formed the thrust and facilitated in the formation of the group's radical structure.

The Birth of Boko Haram

In Albani's view, Boko Haram was birthed by similar movement in Algeria. There in Algeria, rebels and other groups which represented anti-modern sciences and working under government establishments used to send delegation to Saudi Arabia on recruiting mission and to propagate their ideologies during Hajj. Albani explained that it was most probable that Muhammad Yusuf became one of their recruits. From then on, contacts were made and relations were strategized and furthered.

Albani revealed that the international link of Nigerian Boko Haram was created by one indigene of Yobe who lived in Kaduna. He was able to meet the ranks of Yusuf's disciples and potential militants who were not necessarily under Yusuf's mentorship and recruited them. There in Algeria, they would meet different types of professionals including those who would offer them training for guerilla warfare. Nevertheless, the movement in Algeria tried mainly to prevent members from acquiring western-style of education, participation in politics, working in government, etc. Unlike Yusuf, they were not in the meantime, obsessed with overthrowing the regime in order to be able to practice their religion.

Albani's revelation can be evidenced through many ways. In a lecture titled *Guzurin Mujahidai*, Muhammad Yusuf made reference to Algerian movement and narrated how they challenged government and the challenges they faced.¹⁷ Though Yusuf did not explicitly express allegiance and alliance to them, it is clear that he admired them and regarded them as a source of inspiration. He said "nothing will save us except that", meaning that stand which the Algerians took.

However, according to Abdulkareem (2010), the initial founder and kingpin of Boko Haram sect was one Abubakar Lawal from Kano. He later went to Saudi Arabia for further studies and was, therefore, succeeded by some elements who were later ousted by Muhammad Yusuf two years later.¹⁸

17 An undated lecture titled "Muharadar Guzurin Mujahidai", recorded by Khairul Huda DVD &VCD Collection.

18 Abdulkareem, *The Paradox of Boko Haram*, p. 40.

Though Abdulkareem does not mention the specific role Lawal played in the formation of the group and proliferation of its radical activities, it is legitimate to assume that perhaps Lawal was de-radicalized in Saudi Arabia by the Salafi nonviolent and peace-laden canon. This supposition is undergirded by the fact that Lawal's name was never heard in the structure of the group nor had any report indicated that he attempted to reclaim his position even after it later made alliance with popular international "jihad" groups. Nevertheless, this ideological shift is scantily represented in the media and scholarly discourse on the Boko Haram phenomenon.

On Western Education

Albani pointed out that the main focus of Muhammad Yusuf was the occasions and situations in which Islam says something about science. He lamented that without adequate scientific knowledge, how could someone, like the founder of Boko Haram just one day, wake up and declare it as un-Islamic, thus haram? Muhammad Yusuf admitted that he had never attended any academy to acquire the basic primary knowledge.

To demonstrate this, Albani quoted Q 21:31 which talks about the complex scientific theory of big bang, and wondered how someone without the adequate rudimentary grounding in science can extrapolate whether modern science is compatible with the Qur'an or not?

Albani referred the audience to books written by Muslims which extensively treat the topic of science and Qur'an such as *Men and the Universe: Reflections of Ibnul Qayyim*, *The Bible, the Qur'anic Science*, *Zuglul's al-Ardh fi al-Qur'an*, etc. There are also many works of Professor Zuglul on scientific verses of the Qur'an in which he debunked all claims of incompatibility of the Qur'an with modern science, arguing that no single Qur'anic verse on science contradicts modern science, even if it sounds so on the surface. Albani asserted that throughout the historical trends of Muslim scholarship, no scholar had ever declared that Boko as an

educational system is Haram. This point is very significant as one can easily recollect the role of Muslims in the translation of the rich Greek works which culminated to the development and advancement of many scientific fields. A lot of scientific discoveries were championed by Muslim scientists and philosophers who laid down solid and robust foundations to the modern science which the West inherited, repackaged and reproduced.

Darwinism is one of the scientific theories which the Boko Haram members cling upon to completely dismiss western education and condemn whoever engages in it. This is among the topics of the debate which ensued between Shaykh Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami and Muhammad Yusuf. Albani argued that long before Yusuf came to talk about Darwinism, many Muslim scholars such as Harun Yahaya have extensively discussed the issue and charted Islam's viewpoint on the subject.

According to a scholar to whom Albani played host in his lecture titled *Karshen Alewa*, Muhammad Yusuf's father was a follower of Tariqah and an ardent and hardline critic of Boko (western education). The scholar added that Muhammad Yusuf himself admitted that he was strong headed and was obsessed to be admired by people.

There was a time Muhammad Yusuf sought to acquire a certificate in order to get a position in a higher Islamic school in Yobe state. This was affirmed by Malam Hudu, former commissioner of religious affairs in Yobe state. He said Yusuf met him as a government official on the issue. He asked the commissioner to forge a certificate of higher Islamic for him, so that he would enroll in a university. It is worthy of noting that Muhammad Yusuf used to collect salary under the board of Islamic affairs, employed by Yobe State Government. Yusuf would later deny all the deal and even declare that elimination of Malam Hudu was imminent.

On Studying under the Tutelage of Non-Muslims

Albani pointed out that Islam allows Muslims to study under the tutelage of non-Muslims. He postulated that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the first person to employ non-Muslim lecturers in the aftermath of the Battle of Badr. The literate ones among the Quraysh prisoners were employed to teach Muslim children some literacy. Albani quoted the book of the renowned Saudi cleric Bakr Abdallah Abu Zaid *Al-Madaris al-Ajnabiyya al-Alamiyyah fi al-Khalij* based on which members of Boko Haram corroborated their anti-western education views. Ironically, all the author's children as Albani narrated, have attended western-style academies and none of them was for that matter, an Islamic scholar. Albani testified that he personally met Abu Zaid and confirmed this directly from him. This testimony is buttressed by the fact that Abu Zaid attended a modern style academy and had obtained a Ph.D.¹⁹

Another book on which they relied is *Fatawa al-Lajina al-Da'imah* by a body of prominent scholars in Saudi Arabia. Again, it is an irony that members of the scholarly committee who issued the *fatawa* like Shaykh Uthaimin not only enrolled their sons in western-style schools but also sent them to foreign countries such as America. This means something is amiss with the Boko Haram's understanding of the rulings contained in the Saudi fatawa compendium. After all, as Albani Zaria observed, most of the extremists did not have complete original copies but expurgated photostats of most of the books they brandished as bases for their proofs. Albani personally discussed the issue with some members of the group who quoted from the expurgated copies of the books.

It became clear that their leaders exposed them only to pages and chapters which merely present issues surrounding western education before they are treated and solved accordingly in relevant subsequent chapters. Understandably, this had dealt the Boko Haram ideology a serious death

¹⁹ Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, *Is Boko Haram: Responses To 35 Commonly Raised Religious Arguments Against Conventional "Western Education"*. Minna: Islamic Education Trust, 3.

blow and de-radicalized many of the truth-seeking individuals among the group.

De-radicalization

Albani recalled the many occasions in which he encountered members of Boko Haram. One common feature observable from them was looking for harsh and heated utterances and texts which employed harsh language. Having observed the many radical positions of some youths who followed Muhammad Yusuf in Maiduguri and other northeastern states, Albani used to organize a sort of seminars to some willing and truth-seeking folks among them. This effort had effect on some of them and changed their ideological mindset. In one of the seminars titled “Damagun”, Albani tried his best to explain the relationship of Islam and sciences and the Islamic accommodative position of them. He would use and copiously quote and delineate the books which the Boko Haram referred to as the basis of proofs. One of such books is *Madarik al-Nazr fi al-Siyasat bain al-Tatbiqat al-Shar’iyyah wa al-Infi’alat al-Hamasiyyah*. The book which was written by Abdulmalik bin Ahmad al-Jaza’iri is meant to, as Albani Zaria pointed out, connect the dots between youthful exuberance which prompts some Muslims to at all cost and against all odds strive to practice and implement all theoretical postulations contained in the Qur’an and the Sunnah. As the result, they end up bringing more dangers and hardships to Muslims so much so that the Ummah finds itself in a situation in which even the supreme acts of Ibadah like prayer will be difficult to practice. The book dedicates sections which discuss and refute the Shubuhāt surrounding ideologies similar to those of Boko Haram.

Nigerians have in no small measure suffered from the handiwork of Boko Haram, the concern which Shaykh Albani delineated above. Worship places that are expected to serve as safe havens for them to practice their religion peacefully, have become soft targets for Boko Haram atrocities. As the result, even performance of fundamental rituals like Salat became difficult.

Which religious reformer would on earth make the discharge of principal aspects of the religion so difficult and almost impracticable?

Albani added that during these seminars, the youths showed him photocopied pages which mainly present the *Shubuhāt* (doubtful points) without the subsequent pages in which the author debunks the false claims. Albani told them that he had a copy of the whole book given to him by the author.

It can be understood that the leaders of Boko Haram were cunning enough to cling on books as basis of their proofs. They tried to make available those proofs to their followers so as to give legitimacy to their movement. The irony is that the authors of those books mainly sought to challenge and curtail radical movements like Boko Haram.

Another book also authored by Abdulmalik bin Ahmad al-Jaza'iri is the compendium of juristic views (*fatawa*) titled *Fatawa al-Ulama' al-Kibar fi ma Uhdira min Dima' fi al-Jaza'ir* (Juristic Views of Senior Scholars on the Blood Shed in Algeria). It laments and provides solution on chaotic situations that led to series of bloodsheds in Algeria. The book fights radical moves and insurrectionist activities like the one unleashed by Boko Haram in Nigeria, but disproportionately abused and misquoted by Muhammad Yusuf's followers.

Yusuf's Benefactors in Nigeria

Contrary to the claim that followers of Yusuf were mostly vulnerable, indigent, destitute, school drop outs, jobless graduates, and *alamijrai*,²⁰ Albani argued that they permeated other classes, social strata and different backgrounds like highly placed peoples among businessmen, lawyers, educated elite, politicians, etc. They all denounced their professions; students at universities and higher educational institutions dropped out, graduates among them tore their certificates, those working in the civil

20 Ahmed, A.O. (2018). *Boko Haram Since 2009: A Study in Security History*, p. 18.

service abandoned their jobs. In fact, as Mustapha (2014) highlights, they include “children of notable figures, including a nephew of the then serving Governor of Yobe State, a son of the Secretary to Borno State Government, and five children of a local wealthy contractor”.²¹ Also, a member of Borno State Executive Council and a university lecturer were all reportedly followers of Boko Haram.²² Few years after the killing of Boko Haram leader, Nigeria’s President Goodluck Jonathan himself would declare that Boko Haram had infiltrated his government,²³ which justifies Albani’s claim. Albani mentioned that some elements at the level of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other well-established and influential Christians also supported the Boko Haram leader namely Theophilus Danjuma and Professor Jerry Gana. Their goal, according to Albani, was to uphold Muhammad Yusuf’s cause so that Muslims in Nigeria would stop acquiring western education, a move that would hence be of the advantage of their Christian counterparts.

Whether the allegation of Albani was based on strong evidence or not, Nigerians are still aware of what would later transpire in which some Christians were caught trying to detonate explosives in churches, seminaries and other worship places. It is imperative to give few examples here. On September 12, 2011, a Lydia Joseph was caught trying to detonate bomb at St. Catholic Church in Bauchi. On February 26, 2012 one Mr Adams Joseph Ashaba was identified as a suicide bomber who masterminded the bombing of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) in Jos. Similarly, Emmanuel King, disguised as a Muslim on December 28, 2011 was discovered while attempting to explode the RCCG Church in Yenagoa of Bayelsa state.²⁴ This and other incidences explain why Muslims

21 Mustapha, A.R. (2014). *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria*. Rochester: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., p. 168.

22 Ibid.

23 Premium Times, *Boko Haram has infiltrated my government, says Jonathan*. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/3360-boko-haram-has-infiltrated-my-government-says-jonathan.html>. January 8, 2012. Accessed on September 28, 2018.

24 Gwandu, U.J. (2012). Time for politicians to vindicate Islam. *Daily Post*. Available on <http://dailypost.ng/2012/10/21/umar-jibrilu-gwandu-timee-policians-vindicate-islam/>.

are still not only skeptical about the exact mission of Boko Haram, but also suspicious of the involvement of the Church at the centre in the atrocities the extremist group perpetrated. These suspicions were heightened when on September 5, 2014, as many newspapers reported, a jet owned by President of the Christian Association of Nigeria Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, was caught in Johannesburg with almost \$10m cash loaded in several suitcases. The jet carried two Nigerians and an Israeli Eyal Mesiaka and their mission was to purchase weapons. Though the parties involved in the arms' deal were later released by the South African authorities after the intervention of top Nigerian officials, Nigerians were wary that the saga might not be unconnected with the insurgency that was at the time rising at its peak.²⁵ Interestingly, the Christian top clergy did not deny owning the jet, though he claimed to be oblivious of the whole arms deal. Nevertheless, this development caused consequential schism in the Church which perhaps led to the decline of the pastor's popularity among many Christians. Only God knows what would have happened if it were a Muslim clergy who was involved directly or indirectly in the arms deal. The reactions from the Christian quarters would certainly not be the same as the one did by their Muslim counterparts. Up to the present moment, nobody was apprehended or brought to face the wrath of the law on the saga. In any case, not only Albani, but prominent scholars regarded as authorities on Boko Haram discourse like Thurston (2016) would also observe that "Yusuf had been painted as a tool of Christian and external interests hostile to Muslim".²⁶

Albani further mentioned other benefactors of Muhammad Yusuf such as Alhaji Bello Damagun. The latter was a long time benefactor and was influential in sending Yusuf's disciples to Algeria purportedly for study, but which culminated to guerilla training. Damagun and Yusuf would later fell

Accessed on September 22, 2018.

25 Arms Smuggling Jet Caught With \$10million In South Africa Linked to CAN President, Ayo Oritsejafor. *Sahara Reporters*, New York, September 15, 2014. Available on <http://saharareporters.com/2014/09/15/arms-smuggling-jet-caught-10million-south-africa-linked-can-president-ayo-oritsjeafor>. Accessed on September 22, 2018.

26 Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria*, p. 229.

off when the former realized what the latter was up to. Since the meeting and separation of both men occurred before the uprising which awakened most Nigerians on the Boko Haram militancy, it is perceptible that Damagun supported Yusuf to lead an innocuous mission. After all, as Albani narrated, the dispute that separated the two was as occasioned by the fact that Damagun entrusted a bus to Yusuf's care with which his (Damagun's) children would be commuted to western-style education while they were still learning religious knowledge under Yusuf tutelage and custody. Yusuf objected to the arrangement and as the result, Damagun withdrew his children from him.

Procurement/Proliferation of Arms

Blowing a big whistle, Albani asserted that Muhammad Yusuf had planned with his disciples to gather millions of naira for procurement of weapons. The aim was to gradually tax one another so that when the amount was reached, weapons would be purchased. They were able to gather more than 74 million naira from self-taxation and donations by well-wishers.

This account undergirds the theory that the movement had a militant agenda and was all along looking for the ripe time to launch its offensive against authorities. The July 29, 2009 uprising was neither a coincidence nor an attempt to repel or resist government's "brutality" as Yusuf's open letter sought to show. Meanwhile, though Boko Haram members had launched their attack and caused considerable casualties within the ranks of the security operatives, things might not have gone as planned. We learn from Albani's excavation that strategic locations were earmarked and duties were assigned so that when a decisive attack was launched, nothing would prevent the group from the forceful takeover of the state.

From the foregoing, one can imagine how deadlier the group was determined to be right from the time of its founder. Some analysts believe that the atrocities which Boko Haram later committed largely disagrees

with the structural military strength of the group during the time of Muhammad Yusuf. For instance, Bala (2014) doubts that the murderous “Boko Haram has become the cover for something quite unlike the ‘original’ Boko Haram of Muhammad Yusuf”.²⁷ Albani’s revelations that Muhammad Yusuf had a list containing names of scholars which should be eliminated further points to the fact that years before the radical group became openly murderous, the scholar was aware of its long term guerilla preparations.

Foreign Link

Albani further unveiled another factor which facilitated the military strength of the group. He revealed that it got link to Aljabha, a militant “jihadist” movement based in Algeria. Soon the group began smuggling weapons to its Nigerian affiliate clandestinely through ancient trade routes. The weapons were delivered to Boko Haram by turbaned guerillas who camouflaged as date sellers riding camels. They followed less secure paths through Niger Republic down to Nigeria.

This information sounds unique as it is silent in the majority of the literature written about Boko Haram. Perhaps this was occasioned by the fact that it naturally looks difficult to ascertain. A movement that would later go underground, Boko Haram would try its best to maintain confidentiality and keep the move unknown to even most of its members to avoid leakage. Nevertheless, since Shaykh Albani himself conducted fieldworks in the Northeast and had personal knowledge of some of the adherents of the movement, it is inferable that he might have got the leakage from some defectors. After all, the Shaykh’s de-radicalization lectures which he gave before the militant appearance of the group had had relative impact on slashing the number of the sect’s adherents and potential recruits. The chance which Albani found to have direct interactions with Boko Haram members must have been also the source for him to extract sensitive and

27 Bala, S. (2014). “Salafi Targets for ‘Boko Haram’: The Murder of Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam Albani Zaria (d. 2014)”, in *The Annual Review of Islam in Africa*. Issue No. 12/1, 2013/2014, Centre for Contemporary Islam, University of Cape Town., p. 38.

delicate updates about the group's activities and plans. The claim is further buttressed by the accounts of some residents in Maiduguri who alleged that they could remember the presence of men on camels with similar description coming to Maiduguri, and that same people were seen fighting alongside the Boko Haram soldiers during the crisis.²⁸

Boko Haram Leader and El-Zakzaki's IMN

Albani affirmed the many narratives which account for Muhammad Yusuf's stint with the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), founded by Ibrahim Ya'qub el-Zakzaki after the 1979 Iranian revolution. The target was to replicate in Nigeria, the Iran's political shift from secular leadership through revolution to a one guided and manned by "religious" instruments. As highlighted earlier, Yusuf joined the movement in the 1990s at about the age of 20. He was the representative of the movement in Maiduguri. While in the IMN, Muhammad Yusuf must have witnessed the harsh stance of the group on many key issues, including resorting to pugnacious means of challenging positions with which he disagreed. The movement was notorious of carrying out provocative and inciting rhetoric against the government, labelling it as a *kufr*-oriented system and pledging to one day topple it and install an "Islamic" one. The leader encouraged his followers to refuse to attend schools and refrain from working in government establishment so long Nigeria remained a "secular" state.²⁹ Ibrahim al-Gomari, one of Maiduguri scholars who also followed the movement in the past, noted that he wished his secondary school certificate was with him when he saw one of the IMN followers tore his degree certificate in a public glare and the audience chanted "Allahu Akbar".³⁰ Apart from this, scores of

28 Mohammed Abdulkareem, *The Paradox of Boko Haram*, p. 112.

29 Kane, O.(2003). *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*. Boston: E.J Brill Leiden, p. 95.

30 In Albani's lecture titled "Karshen Alewa Kasa 3". Available on

<https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=Karshen+Alewa+Kasa+Sheikh+Albani+Zaria+video&oq=karshen&aqs=chrome..69j57j69i59j3739j0j7&client=tablet-android-samsung&sourceid=chrome-mobile&ie=UTF-8> .

Accessed on August 16, 2018.

skirmishes and at times bloody clashes perpetrated by the movement were recorded (and are still witnessed). This is further corroborated by leakages indicating that some members of the group during lifetime of Muhammad Yusuf, were recruited to attend guerilla training camps in Iran,³¹ a country known to be in robust ideological and political terms with Ibrahim el-Zakzaki. When Zakzaki's men had a brush with security forces in Zaria in December 2015 an audio clip was widely circulated containing a telephone conversation between el-Zakzaki and an Iranian diplomat asking the former to describe any support he required (even if military) to rescue him from the ongoing liquidation of the Nigerian army.

By hinting that Muhammad Yusuf's father was a disciple to Maitatsine, Albani implied that the Boko Haram leader might have inherited the idea of anti-western education from him. Interestingly, Albani was not alone in ratiocinating Maitatsine's uprising with that of Muhammad Yusuf. Some analysts believe that Boko Haram is an offshoot of the Maitatsine. According to Ahmed (2008):

the ideological differences between the two groups sets [sic] them apart even though both have adopted terrorism as a weapon and both hid under the ambit of Islam. The Maitatsine violence ended when the security forces killed the sect's leader, but that of the Boko Haram only escalated when the group's leader was killed.³²

Therefore, since no one doubts that Muhammad Yusuf did not in person have any sojourn of discipleship under Maitatsine and that he was in his teenage during the latter's crisis, it is more coherent and less unlikely to suggest that he got the pugnacious tenacity and confrontational tendencies from el-Zakzaki. Nevertheless, Maitatsine's factor is relevant when panoramic study is carried out on historical trajectories of religious conflicts and ideological dissidence in Nigeria. Unlike Muhammad Yusuf who most writers link to the Salafis, having at some times attended some of their

31N.I.O. & D.L.-B. (n.d). *Boko Haram: Between Myth and Reality*. No publication information.

32 Ahmed, *Boko Haram Since 2009*, p. 6.

teachings before he was expelled from particularly Indimi Mosque, what perhaps is missing in most of the literature discussing Maitatsine saga is that before he was cracked down by the security, he was well accommodated, harboured, backed and financed by wealthy Sufi comrades.³³

Therefore, unlike all the anti-government rhetoric amplified by Ibrahim al-Zakzaki and later by Muhammad Yusuf, Albani advocated for compliance with laws, rules and regulations of the land. Even in the context where Nigerian security members were subjecting people to severe hardships due to security checks, Albani saw no reason why people should not comply with official directives and rules of the authorities.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be easily discerned that Muslim scholars in Nigeria have not kept mute about the dreaded extremist Boko Haram. About half of the war against the group can be said to have been waged by the scholars. It can be argued that Shaykh Albani was one of the fiercest critics of the group. The role he played in targeting and accordingly challenging the ideological legitimacy of the group's intellectual claim has greatly helped in slashing the number of the group's members, admirers and sympathizers. Importantly, Albani's effort in challenging Boko Haram, like many other Muslim scholars, did not start in the wake of 2009 crackdown of the group by the Nigerian security, but many years back. This points to the sincerity of purpose and timely intervention of the scholar on the predicament. Needless to say, instead of taking mild position after Boko Haram became publically militant, Albani persisted in his criticism of them and even took fiercest and wildest approach in tackling their ideology. This partly explains why the militants would consider his elimination inevitably imminent. Perhaps very few would argue that Albani was not unaware of every possibility of his murder by the group as he represented a stumbling

³³Interview with Ibrahim Ahmad on September 29th, 2018 in Kano.

block and posed a big threat to the legitimacy of its ideologies and actions. Without all these intrepid efforts exerted by Nigerian Muslim scholars, especially Shaykh Albani Zaria, one cannot fully imagine the degree to which the deviant ideologies of Boko Haram would have spread.

This article has attempted to present a thematic analysis of three lectures of Shaykh Muhammad Awwal Adam (Albani Zaria), which he gave on Boko Haram. The writer tried to in many instances, look for relevant external sources to corroborate or disagree with some of the issues raised and treated by the scholar in the lectures. Important points which the lectures excavated included the basis of proof according to the Salaf, Islamic view of western education and studying under the tutelage of non-Muslims. In addition to the biography of Muhammad Yusuf, the lectures dispensed audience with insights on crucial factors that helped the rise and growth of the group. These included domestic benefactors which comprised both Muslims and non-Muslims, foreign link and the influence of Shaykh Ibrahim el-Zakzaki's anti-government and anti-western education tendencies. Understandably, the scholar did not dwell much on politics and democracy – a point which stands as a fundamental pillar upon which the Boko Haram's anti-government views were built. This was perhaps, because Shaykh Albani dedicated lecture series in which he extensively treated the topic of democracy and politics in Nigeria.

All this said, it is clear that Muslim scholars are important partners in deradicalizing insurgents and thwarting the spread of extremist ideologies in Nigeria. It is therefore, recommended that government should on a serious note assist Muslim scholars' efforts in tackling the group intellectually. It should attempt placing the intellectual leadership of the group on a discourse and debating table, so that through the engagement, more fruitful results as regards bringing them back to order could be achieved. In the same vein, the many undocumented (though possibly audio-visually recorded) responses and engagements of scholars with the group

should be written and studied so that the reading world will be awakened and informed about those impactful efforts.

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